

43. Managing Trustees of the Methodist Central Hall, Westminster

Contact name and details	The Revd Michaela A Youngson Chair of the Managing Trustees
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Introduction

This report from the Managing Trustees gives an overview of the situation facing Methodist Central Hall, Westminster during 2020-21. Few activities have taken place at the Hall since mid-March 2020 due to COVID-19 and the Hall has been closed, apart from the live-streaming of services, for the vast majority of that time. The successful performance of the Conference and Events business over the previous two years has ensured that commercial loans and reserves are available to cover the immediate period of closure. However the result is that the Hall is in debt by **£2.7M** as of 31 March 2021 and the future is going to be challenging. The Trust has been self-financing since its establishment in 1994 and has not sought any financial support from the Connexion in this time. Continuing this independent approach may not be possible, due to the impact of the pandemic. Much will depend on when events business returns.

Ministry of the Church

In July 2020 the Revd Tony Miles took over as Superintendent Minister at Central Hall after 16 years as part of the ministerial team. The Revd Lansford Penn-Timothy joined the team. Several members of the church staff (including the Directors of Music) have been on furlough during the last year. The Trust's grant to the Church has been reduced by 50% to £130,000 per year. The Church is able to accommodate this from its reserves for 2020-21.

The Church has not been open for face-to-face services since March 2020 (other than two evening services in October). However live-streamed services have been very successful, with an average of 5,000 individuals and families accessing the services – compared to a normal Sunday morning congregation of 200-300. New equipment has been installed into the Chapel to facilitate the weekly online services. A new dimension has been that the church has been able to offer its unique media resources to the Connexion, for the Conference Service in 2020, plus the regular involvement of key connexional figures in worship across the past year. With a staff member dedicated to digital outreach and a Superintendent vastly experienced in media ministry the Trustees have strong hope that the influence of the Hall will have still further reach in the years to come - these are exciting times. A weekly email is sent to 1,000 people. The 'Global' in the church's vision statement is becoming a reality and will change the way we do things in the future.

The ministers are loyally supported by church officers and other volunteers in carrying out a diverse range of tasks. Membership now stands at 415, with a small reduction due to the inability to hold the usual church membership classes. The role of our pastoral

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leaders has provided invaluable assistance to the pastoral care offered by the ministerial team. Our five cultural fellowship groups are also providing a splendid source of support for our members, using WhatsApp groups to keep in touch with their members.

The Trust and church have had to reduce the grant support to the St Vincent's Family Project (SVFP), which normally meets within the Hall premises. The Project has adapted its mode of operation and sources of income.

The Conference Centre

Mr Paul Southern, Managing Director, leads the Conference Centre team which markets the facilities of Central Hall, which forms the largest conference venue in Central London, with over 25 rooms. The team is sharing its experience with other Methodist venues to maximise their revenue potential.

The period up to March 2020 was very successful for the business, but the building has essentially been closed since then. Thirteen staff were made redundant in October and of the 18 remaining, four are on full-time furlough and the rest are working two or three days per week (as of March 2021). The building was put into hibernation from February and will remain in this state until there is revenue to pay for the running of the facilities. It is likely that church services will return before conference events and this will result in additional costs being borne by the local church congregation.

Critical Financial Situation

Taking the Trust and its trading subsidiary CHW Ltd combined, we had net cash (cash less borrowings) of £0.3M in March 2020. This had become net borrowings of £2.7M at March 2021 and is forecast to increase to net borrowings of £3.6M at 31 August 2021. A further loan is under discussion with HSBC to accommodate our requirements for the coming months. Before the pandemic, the business was generating around £0.5M surplus per year for the use of the Trust, so it is anticipated that this level of debt can be paid back over time, but further commercial support beyond this level seems unlikely. The Trust was unsuccessful in gaining support from the Arts Council Grant scheme, and no other relief seems likely to yield material assistance.

The Building

The Hall is in good shape physically and basic maintenance operations are ongoing at a minimal cost level.

The Trustees

The Chair of The Trustees is held by one of the Chairs of the London District. The Revd Michaela Youngson has held this role since 2012, but moves on to become the Assistant Secretary of the Conference in September 2021 and will be replaced as Chair of the Trustees by the Revd Nigel Cowgill.

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The Nominations Committee continues to work to ensure that the Trustee body includes committed individuals with relevant skills and experience, particularly in the areas of finance, legal affairs, heritage architecture and Methodist mission, along with appropriate diversity in its membership.

In negotiating loans and overdrafts the Trustees have found their current structure as a Charitable Trust to give complexity in terms of avoiding personal liability and will investigate the possibility of conversion to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

The Future

The flourishing online Sunday congregation and the ongoing community engagement of the Church demonstrates Methodist commitment to an outward oriented mission, with God's love at its heart. The Trustees work collaboratively with both Church and Company to ensure the future viability of Methodist Central Hall Westminster in providing a beacon of Methodist Christian Mission and presence at the heart of London, but may need Connexional support to enable this to continue.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

43/1. The Conference adopts the Report.

43/2. The Conference appoints the following Managing Trustees of the Conference Property at Central Hall Westminster:

The Revd Nigel Cowgill (Chair of the Managing Trustees and Convenor – ex officio)

The Revd Anthony D Miles (Superintendent, Westminster Circuit – ex officio)

Mr Nevil Tomlinson (Treasurer to the Trustees)

* Mrs Ama Ackah-Yensu

Mr Kojo Amoah-Arko

Mr Joseph Anoom

Ms Ruby Beech

* Mr Michael Davies

Mr Alan Eccles

Mr Martin Lougher

* Ms Genevieve Patnelli

* The Revd Lansford Penn-Timothy

* Mr Wesley Gibbs

Dr Joanna Williamson

** Indicates the people nominated by the Westminster Circuit Meeting.*

Indicates Trustees who have served for 6 years or more

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Reasoned Statements for Trustees who have exceeded six years of service

Mr Kojo Amoah-Arko – Chartered Accountant – provides valued financial input.

Reasoned Statements for New Trustees

The Revd Lansford Penn-Timothy – Presbyterian in the Westminster Circuit.

Mr Wesley Gibbs – a committed member of Methodist Central Hall Westminster and a Circuit Steward for the Westminster Circuit.